

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

decline in conversions. Spring and Fall pastoral visits, exhortations to attend Mass, inquiries into absences—all show the native Christians' constant need for stimulus to piety and tendency to backslide. It is curious that the Mission has in itself and in its converts deliberately encouraged greed and materialism as a means of spiritual salvation.

Efforts to adapt Christian doctrine have been frowned upon by the Church. A Papal Bull forbade assimilating the ancestral cult to Purgatorial dogma. An experienced missionary,¹ recognizing the difference in native mentality, concocted a new Paradise to suit variegated Annamite tastes. He found that sitting on the right hand of God was too vague a formula to stimulate Annamite ambition. The tortures of Hell were far more comprehensible* To make a Paradise to match, he filled it with fruit trees, cock-fights, plenty of good food, gaming houses, and libraries. But his superiors, safely tucked away in Rome, where they were too remote to understand and too enmeshed in theory, removed this dangerous missionary to another field. This inelasticity and rigidity of the Church has cost it many a convert, and forced the Mission into a colonial career of temporal possessions.

Not only were many French colonials not attractive exemplars of Christian virtues, but the type of Annamite who forsook all to acquire rice-fields was of so low a social and moral fibre that he alienated the best of his compatriots from Christianity. Whole villages had to turn Catholic to avoid the moral and physical isolation that individual conversions would have entailed. When converts came to claim their share of the family heritage the ensuing struggles made the Mission hated and feared. The mandarinat, since the pre-conquest days, had persecuted

the Mission and the feeling was later enforced by their privileged position. Since the War the Mission has made an effort to improve the quality of its converts, to attract the indifferent, and to propitiate the hostile. Secondary education, newspapers, lectures, organizations like the *Jetmesse Catholique* and the *Cercle Annamite des Etudes Catholiques* have succeeded in attracting a certain number, but the influence of Communism has made many of the young Annamites incurably hostile. Communist hatred of the Mission is not based solely on its dislike of Christianity *per se*, but on the economic role it plays in the colony. Natives working Mission property are depicted as serfs in the usurious stranglehold of the Mission. They point to the nefarious role played by the Mission during the conquest, when it aided the French against Annamite patriots* Similarly they claim that during the 1931 uprising

¹ Monet, P., *Lesjaumers* (Bans, 1931)* p, 116.